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ABSTRACT

The importance of parenting roles and home environments on the young child's learning is given support through an examination of current child development research and contemporary sociological theory. Some methods that can be employed by the child care professional to facilitate parent involvement and awareness include: (1) interaction groups between child care professionals and parents concerning perception and understanding of parenting roles, (2) guided observation of young children in group settings based upon developmental theory, and (3) facilitation of open communication within the emerging triad of parent/child/child care professional. A key ingredient of successful parent-professional groups has been the creation of group support systems, where the parenting role can be examined in detail, children can be observed in a variety of situations, and parents can be helped to better understand the demands of children's developmental patterns. A simple set of guidelines is suggested that might be developed, explained, and shared with parents before they observe a group of children. As parents and child care workers begin to share ideas and communicate about the needs of the child, the child care worker will be better able to develop approaches to facilitate parent's greater awareness and involvement in their child's growth at home and at school. (CS)

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THE CHILD CARE PROFESSIONAL/PARENT/CHILD: AN EMERGING TRIAD

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The Child Care Professional/Parent/Child: An Emerging Triad

Preschool Child to Her Mother and Teacher:
"How Can You Both Teach Me Unless You
Know One Another?"

Dr. Marcyie Southall

This quotation is a child's verbalization of the growing feeling among child care professionals and parents that any enduring change in the young child's development can only be affected through appreciable change in the people most clearly associated with the child on a day to day basis. For most children this means the parent/s.

It is currently recognized that the relationships between the child and the parent/s can be strengthened through effective child care programs. For this to occur, child care programs, services, and staff must be committed to the concept that the child's parents are the most important persons in his life. A corollary to this commitment is that parents are valuable assets to the center and must become genuinely and fully involved in the functioning of the on going program. On one hand as parents decide to share the responsibility for care and education of the child they will, on the other, recognize that child care programs can be a valuable resource in and supplement to his or her development. In a contemporary child care program, the staff also realizes that their influence over the child can not override that of the parents. With parents who genuinely are involved and desire participation a triad develops with the parent, child, and center staff acting and interacting as a unit. The outcome of the interaction within the triad is quality care for the child. Parent/s as well as center staff give security, love,

information, control his or her life, direct behavior, and emphasis ideals of conduct and character fundamental to individual and group living. This healthy environment must also be present for each member of the triad to live, work, and grow together.

The return of the Mom and/or Dad in playing a role in the child's learning is quite new and is juxtoposed to older and more traditional approaches of parent "participation" of the mid 1960's. Here parents were treated as silent and sometimes "nonexistent" partners. The only connection between the parent and teacher was the child. The parent felt and, in some cases rather emphatically, told that it was not wise for them to think about participating in the child's learning. It was more desirable for professionals to do the "caring," "teaching," or "guiding." This "caring" of the children by professionals was erroneously assumed to be totally independent from children's learning in home environments and further more had little relationship to child rearing practices.

Specifically this arbitrary separation of the home and the "learning" environment was an outgrowth of some of the older theories of child development. Generally, these theories assumed the biological innateness of development and also viewed intelligence of the young child as rather fixed. Under these traditional theories the early years of the child, birth through five, were regarded as important in facilitating personality and socialization. Further, the child's attitude toward "learning" was recognized as a product of the home.

Recognition that the child was immersed in a total learning environment composed of important experiences in the home and neighborhood, as well as in the classroom is a segment of current and contemporary theory. Through current developmental research of J. McVicker Hunt, Benjamin Bloom, and

Jean Piaget, contemporary theory, in addition to recognizing the potent influence of the parents on the child, also points out how crucial the early years are in the intellectual, psychomotor, as well as social-effective development of the young child. Further, developmental research has suggested that a "warm, positive, parenting attitude," "mother's acceleration," and "democratic homes" have been found to increase the young child's intellectual and verbal abilities. Suggested as antecedents for differences in development in favor of verbal abilities were the degree of parent's and caregiver's emphasis on verbal accomplishments and academic achievements.

Lastly, the results of contemporary research suggests that children learn in all settings throughout the day and that success in learning requires situations in which both home and school work together. The field of child care is currently moving toward a new home school partnership based upon these current and respected child development principles derived from research.

In addition to current child development research, contemporary sociological theory provides further support for this rediscovery of the parent/s and home environments and the crucial role they play in the young child's learning. These perspectives must also be considered when supporting and discussing the importance of joint participation of the home and school in the young child's learning. Social justification for genuine home school cooperation can be based upon parent's democratic rights. This implies that values and goals with related educational objectives are the province of the people in a cultural pluralistic and free society. Thus, parents have the right and moral obligation to genuinely participate in the totality of children's learning. A second sociological perspective supporting strong ties between home and school deals with children's performance. Parents must

be involved in the totality of their child's learning not only because the parents recognize the importance of education but also because they are fundamentally concerned about their children's progress and performance. Negative attitudes between home and school do exist. However, these parental attitudes are related to the perceived irrelevance of the learning activities that their children perform and in some cases to the impersonality and imperviousness of the center to changing times. The closer cooperation between the home and school will do much to reduce these attitudes and in many cases each of understanding. The third sociological justification for regarding the home as an indispensible asset to the school lies in the origin of the school's objectives. These objectives for the most part come from real priorities of people who have enrolled their children in the center and not from college textbooks or committee's decisions. It is also well understood that the home as a learning center, represents a major resource for improving the quality and quantity of learning. The fourth justification based upon Dewey's ideas suggests that a strong healthy society requires strengthening of the home. Given the genuine involvement of the parent, the school at all levels may have a greater and more desirable effect upon social change.

The support received from current child development research and contemporary sociological theory has hastened the shift from parents as silent parents to parents as involved partners with their child's learning. Child care workers who have given lip-service to parent interaction are now becoming obligated, and rightfully so, to genuinely and actively develop strong home and school relationships. As one outcome of this interaction between home and school, child care professionals are being asked to actually demonstrate and show parents how they can assist in facilitating their child's growth. They are also becoming more concerned about identifying genuine ways to work

with parents in the center and home to accomplish this objective.

Selected Techniques for Working with Parents

Parenting has been termed the only profession for which no systematic preparation or continued inservice training is available. And yet, it numbers of individuals involved can be used as a measure, parenting remains a number one career choice. It is important, here, to draw a clear distinction between parenthood and parenting. Parenthood may be considered the role of conceiving and bearing a child. Parenting is much more than this physical capacity. Parenting deals with the responsibility of building, maintaining, and nurturing adult/child relationships which includes developmental growth of their children.

Adults who have assumed the parenting roll, are keenly aware of its inherent responsibilities and accountability to society. It is because of this sense of responsibility that the task of helping parents become more effective in their parenting roles becomes both easier and more difficult. The task is made easier when the teachable nature of the young motivated learner is considered. However, the task is made more difficult when the possible burden of parental failure is discussed. Society has come to judge the success or failure of a parent in the success and failure of his or her children.

Child care professionals, earnestly dedicated to the goal of assisting parents develop essential parenting skills, are faced with the question, "What is essential to effective parenting?" As contemporary child development research and sociological theory, is synthesized, there appears three central points of emphasis in responding to this question. These points of emphasis also provide some direction to the child care professional in aiding the parents understanding of the children's growth. First, parents, as mature adults, must

develop a clear understanding of themselves as individuals. Second, parents need an appreciation for the demands and limits of developmental patterns their children are experiencing. Third, parents must develop open communication between and among themselves, child care professionals, and their children.

....Interacting in Group Settings

For individuals to explore and evaluate their self-concept and personality it is essential that a climate of acceptance and trust be developed. Such a supportive atmosphere has been reported in the growing number of programs which emphasize contact between center and home. Such programs usually involve groups of three to five families meeting together with two or three child care professionals. A key ingredient of successful parent-professional groups has been the creation of group support systems. Within context of such group settings, a parent together with the child care staff can explore their own feelings about self and about parenting in relation to that self on an informal basis. The effectiveness of this technique is strongly tied to the leadership provided by the child care professionals. Before leading such a group, it is important to develop adequate skill in group facilitation, an understanding of how group processes operate, the influence of individual family backgrounds and a sensitivity to the goals which emerge from the group itself. Within the context of such a group setting, individual parents can begin to identify and verbalize their own concerns and needs. Through the interaction of group members together, behavior can be clarified, alternatives proposed, solutions tried, and programs implemented.

....Observation

Within or outside the school, parents can be helped to better understand the realistic constraints and demands of developmental trends. Exposing

parents to groups of young children can help develop and understanding of developmental patterns. However, parents need help from child care professionals before they can gain insights through observation. A simple set of guidelines might be developed, explained and shared with parents before they observe a group of children, the guidelines as well as their observations can again be discussed with them after they have observed the children. Such guidelines might include:

1. Try to put your own feelings aside. For example, observe how the child feels about the messy activity not how you feel about him or her becoming dirty.
2. Look for patterns in a child's behavior. Does one child consistently follow another child to a new activity? Such behavior may tell you that friendship might be the important factor not the experiences provided.
3. Note how a child does a particular activity, not the end result. For example, a child may be mixing many different colors of paint at an easel. The end result, of his or her efforts, is a shapeless black blob or paint. The finished product at first glance may not reflect learning about the effects of mixing colors.

As parents observe children within a group setting, they will see their child in a variety of situations. The typical schedule will, generally, contain a number of routines along with considerable freedom to explore. Parents can also see the growth of skills in social affective, cognitive, and psychomotor development. Through observation, parents can learn about the developmental stages a child goes through in learning fine eye-hand coordination, reading, to use spontaneous oral language, control emotions, and to build friendships. Observation backed up with appropriate discussion can help unlock some of the mysteries of a child's development for parents and

at the same time the road to further cooperation between and among members of the emerging triad is being paved.

....Communication

Communication about the child and the program is an important concern of most child care professionals and parents. Once parents have gained some insight into their own personalities children's needs, capabilities, and how these two areas mesh together within the school, communication is simplified. Although individual styles of communication vary, there are basic components which parents can be taught.

Learning to Share Myself--A first step for child care professionals in building open communication among members of the triad is teaching parents how to share thoughts, feelings motives, and values. Parents can gain much openness by talking with a supportive staff. The parent and professional can help each other by providing a climate of acceptance. Just as a parent learns to "get it all out," he or she can help a child do the same. Parents can also be shown that tolerating mistakes can help a child begin to evaluate and make changes in his or her behavior without loss of self-worth.

Learning to Listen -- A message comes in a variety of packages. Listening to words alone may not be enough. Ask parents to think about the ways they could say, "I love you!" to a spouse, their own parent, a child, a friend, or machine that has just saved them ten hours of manual labor. The words may be the same but the meaning is quite different. Differences in meaning can be picked up by listening to the voice, looking at the face, and watching body movements. But the only way individuals can assertain the "real" meanings behind the words is to check out our perceptions of them in the environment. Parents in group discussions can be led to begin asking themselves and their children, "Are we really hearing the message?" For example, when helping a preschool age child who has limited verbal skills, a parent

parents concerning perception and understanding of parenting roles, 2) guided observation of young children in group settings based upon developmental theory, and, 3) facilitation of open communication within the merging triad of parent/child/child care professional. In the final analysis it will be up to the child care worker and parent to share ideas and tell needs and for the child care worker to continue to develop approaches to facilitate parent's greater awareness of and involvement in their child's growth at home and at the center.

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must begin to pick up clues from isolated behavior as well as from units or patterns of behavior. These activities all contribute to 'learning to listen.'

Learning to Work Together -- A growing child continually confronts both parent and child care professional with new problems to solve and decisions to make. Although the immediate solution of exercising adult authority over the child may be the most efficient response at the moment, the child care professional can help the parent develop awareness into and examine the developmental implications in hasty answers. It can be pointed out that before a child can grow he or she must begin to excercise some control over his or her life. Parents can assist the child by involving him or her in the process of decision making and problem solving. A parent who takes time to explore alternatives and weigh foreseeable consequences is demonstrating and employing a basic approach to problem solving that will be modeled by the young child. A child with limited experience may not be capable of understanding the full range of possible solutions, but the child care worker can point out that the child must be given opportunity and practice in decision making. Through continued exposure this process will prepare the child to assume more responsibility when he or she has gained enough maturity.

Conclusion

Given the contemporary development research and current sociological theory, supporting the importance of parenting roles, the home environments and the young child's learning, parents are becoming more active and playing larger roles in their child's total learning in home and school environments. This involvement in their children's total learning, not only means participation in all aspects of child care programs and services but also learning how to become more helpful in their children's development. Some methods that can be employed by the child care professional to facilitate parent understanding include: 1) interaction groups between child care professionals and

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